

Statement of Congressman Don Sherwood
House Agriculture Committee
1300 Longworth House Office Building
Thursday July 27, 2006

Good morning Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking member Peterson, and members of the Agriculture Committee.

I appreciate very much the opportunity to be here today to share my thoughts on H.R. 503 this bill would amend the Horse Protection Act to prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption.

The reason that I feel compelled to testify is that for the last 30 years I have spent my spare time breeding, raising and showing Belgian Draft Horses.

No one is a bigger horse lover than I.

At most times my partner and I have had between 10 – 20 Belgians on our farm so I more than most, understand the emotional attachment that we all have for horses.

But horse owners need a way to deal with horses that are no longer needed or no longer healthy and sound or that can't be trained or handled.

The market has developed a way that is economically viable to dispose of horses that are unwanted or unusable.

That slaughter market is important for the Equine Industry for the same reason that it is for the Dairy Industry.

A Dairy Cow ruined by mastitis or simply a poor producer quickly becomes a financial drain to her owner.

Fortunately for the Dairy Farmer the meat animal industry market is there to claim that cow, relieving the owner of a financial burden and providing useful and nutritious food.

Not the choice thick porterhouse steaks for the BBQ Grill but none the less good beef.

There is no reason Congress should destroy the similar market for unwanted, unusable or surplus horses. Even though we don't consume horses in our own culture, there is an active export market.

This bill would have huge negative economic consequences for rural America.

It appears that there are about 90, 000 horses a year that for some reason become unusable or unwanted.

With the average cost to properly maintain a horse in most parts of the county at approx. \$1,900 annually and with the exponential growth of these animals the economic costs would become Huge.

With out sufficient facilities or funding many of these unwanted horses would be neglected and face poor care and in some cases even starvation.

The truly compassionate action for these horses is to continue to have an orderly market for their disposition.

Some proponents of HR 503 – argue that the answer is euthanasia, even though this means that it would end the horse slaughter market and kill the horses another way.

This is economically unsustainable and it ends up with the same fate for the unwanted horses.

The Agriculture Market Economy has worked well for over 200 years.

I don't see any rational reason that we in Washington should start down this slippery slope that would hurt our economy in a significant way, and probably end up with in-humane treatment of these surplus horses which we all feel so fondly about.

H.R. 503 makes no economic or compassionate sense and should be defeated.